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Policy issues for information and communications technology: promoting the integration and application of information and communications technology policy through the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative

Implementation of the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway and the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Regional Cooperation Framework Document

Note by the secretariat

Summary

The implementation of the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway is in its last year of implementation (2018). Key milestones include the support by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for the Master Plan and the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Regional Cooperation Framework Document, which articulate the principles, deliverables and time frame, with concrete actionable strategies, for improving broadband connectivity in Asia and the Pacific. In addition, effective partnerships have been leveraged for the implementation of the Master Plan and the Regional Cooperation Framework Document, resulting in proposals for new initiatives and implementation modalities and plans. Subsequently, member countries further developed updates to the Master Plan for the next four years (2019–2022) as a blueprint to guide the next stage of implementation, taking into account the outcomes of the meetings of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee, held in Dhaka in November 2017, and of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Group, held in Bangkok in December 2017, among others.

The present document contains an outline of the essential elements of the updates to the Master Plan. It also contains a proposal on the way forward and issues for consideration by the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation at its second session.

* ESCAP/CICTSTI/2018/L.1.

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I. Introduction

1. Information and communications technology (ICT) is a "meta-infrastructure", a growth industry and a critical development enabler. ICT-enabled financial, transport and trade facilitation infrastructure, applications and services are the foundation of the digital economy and society that encourage innovations and qualitative societal transformations. Broadband-enabled technologies, such as artificial intelligence, are particularly effective in increasing efficiencies that drive growth and innovation in various sectors of the economy. ICT is also widely appreciated for its capacity to reach remote and rural areas by means of mobile and satellite devices and to deliver essential services, such as health, education, agricultural information and time-critical disaster alerts. It has been used to improve monitoring and understanding of environmental degradation, natural resource use and climate change-related incidents with newly developed technologies such as the Internet of things and big data. Thus, ICT is a critical infrastructure, industry and instrument for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and of leaving no one behind.

2. However, as reviewed in document ESCAP/CICTSTI/2018/3, the broadband divide in Asia and the Pacific is widening, while the window of opportunity for developing countries to catch up is narrowing, given the rapid advancement of frontier technologies, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain. The development and roll-out of these frontier technologies depend heavily on the availability and affordability of robust broadband networks; without such infrastructure, even the more conventional applications and services, such as e-commerce, e-health and intelligent transport systems, might not function effectively and reach their intended users in remote and rural areas.

3. Member States of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) recognized the strategic significance of ICT connectivity as a key component in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. In the Bangkok Declaration on Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration in Asia and the Pacific,[1] member States were encouraged to enhance regional cooperation on seamless connectivity in the areas of ICT, transport and energy. In addition, the regional road map for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific[2] was endorsed by ESCAP member States in 2017. In the road map, it was recognized that, while broadband Internet access had improved within the region, the digital divide continued to widen between member States. This means that some member States may be left out of the socioeconomic opportunities created by broadband connectivity. Specifically, in the regional road map, it was recognized that the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, which was developed and supported by member States to address the above-mentioned challenges and opportunities in enhancing regional broadband connectivity, was an opportunity to expand regional cooperation on ICT.

4. Against this background, the aim of the present document is to highlight the progress made in the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative to date and present information on the proposed four-year extension of the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway, information on the way forward and issues for consideration

[1] Commission resolution 70/1, annex.

[2] E/ESCAP/73/31, annex II.

by the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation at its second session.

II. Highlights of the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative

5. The Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative was developed and implemented in accordance with intergovernmental decisions and a number of milestones have been reached.

A. Review of intergovernmental mandates

6. In Commission resolution 69/10 of 1 May 2013, the Commission recognized the need to promote the exchange of best practices and experiences related to the development of ICT infrastructure, including an in-depth analysis of the policy and regulatory barriers that could impede efforts to synchronize the deployment of ICT infrastructure across the region in a seamless manner.

7. The precursor to the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation, the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, at its fourth session,[3] in 2014, requested that the secretariat establish an open-ended working group on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway to develop principles and norms, as well as a master plan, covering the policy and technical aspects of the Asia-Pacific information superhighway.

8. In addition, at that session, which was held jointly with that of the Committee on Transport, the two Committees recommended that member States should consider amending the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Trans-Asian Railway Network and the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network to encourage co-deployment of fibre-optic cables along passive infrastructure.

9. In its resolution 71/10, the Commission endorsed those recommendations. It further requested the secretariat to promote the sharing of experiences, good practices and lessons learned in ICT for disaster risk reduction and e-resilience, to support the work of the Working Group on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway, to undertake research and analysis, to build partnerships and collaboration with international and regional organizations and to harness cross-sectoral synergies.

10. As a result, expert consultations were held by the secretariat in 2013 and 2014 on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway in Manila (23 and 25 September 2013),[4] Baku (3 and 4 December 2013)[5] and Paro, Bhutan (1 and 2 October 2014)[6] at which experts supported the synchronized construction of

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[3] The Committee on Information and Communications Technology encouraged strengthened cooperation on ICT for sustainable development in the region at its second session and third sessions, held in 2010 and 2012, respectively.

[4] See www.unescap.org/events/expert-consultation-asian-information-superhighway-and-regional-connectivity-philippines.

[5] See www.unescap.org/events/expert-consultation-asian-information-superhighway-and-regional-connectivity-azerbaijan.

[6] See www.unescap.org/events/expert-consultation-asia-pacific-information-superhighway-and-regional-connectivity.

fibre-optic, transport and energy infrastructure and underlined the cost effectiveness of this method of infrastructure development.

11. Also as a result, the first meeting of the Working Group on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway was held in Incheon, Republic of Korea, on 1 and 2 September 2015.[7] It was co-hosted by ESCAP and the Ministry of Science and ICT of the Republic of Korea and attended by representatives of 20 member States as well as representatives of United Nations agencies, regional organizations, the private sector, civil society and think tanks.

12. The Working Group began the task of drafting a master plan encompassing the long-term vision, targeted goals, specific activities and milestones with regard to the four pillars of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative. In addition, it decided to draft a regional cooperation framework document to support the master plan. The Working Group also agreed on issues relating to its governance structure and operation.[8]

13. The Working Group also decided to establish a steering group comprising multi-stakeholder representatives with policy and technical expertise to review drafts of the master plan and the regional cooperation framework document. In addition, the Working Group underlined the importance of promoting investment in fibre-optic broadband connectivity, enhancing Internet traffic and network management, enhancing ICT network resilience to natural disasters and improving access to affordable broadband for all.

14. Co-hosted by ESCAP and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of China, the second meeting of the Working Group was held in Guangzhou, China, on 29 and 30 August 2016[9] and attended by representatives of 16 member States as well as representatives of United Nations agencies, regional organizations, the private sector, civil society and think tanks. The objectives of the second meeting were to review the drafts of the master plan, including its seven strategic initiatives, and the regional cooperation framework document prepared by the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Group. In addition, Working Group members were updated on the progress made with regard to the research and analyses in support of the development of the master plan and the regional cooperation framework document.

15. The Working Group reviewed and considered for endorsement the draft master plan and regional cooperation framework document and recommended that they be submitted to the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation at its first session.

16. The Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology endorsed the draft master plan and regional cooperation framework document at its first session in October 2016. Subsequently, in 2017, the Government of Bangladesh submitted to the Commission a resolution on the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information

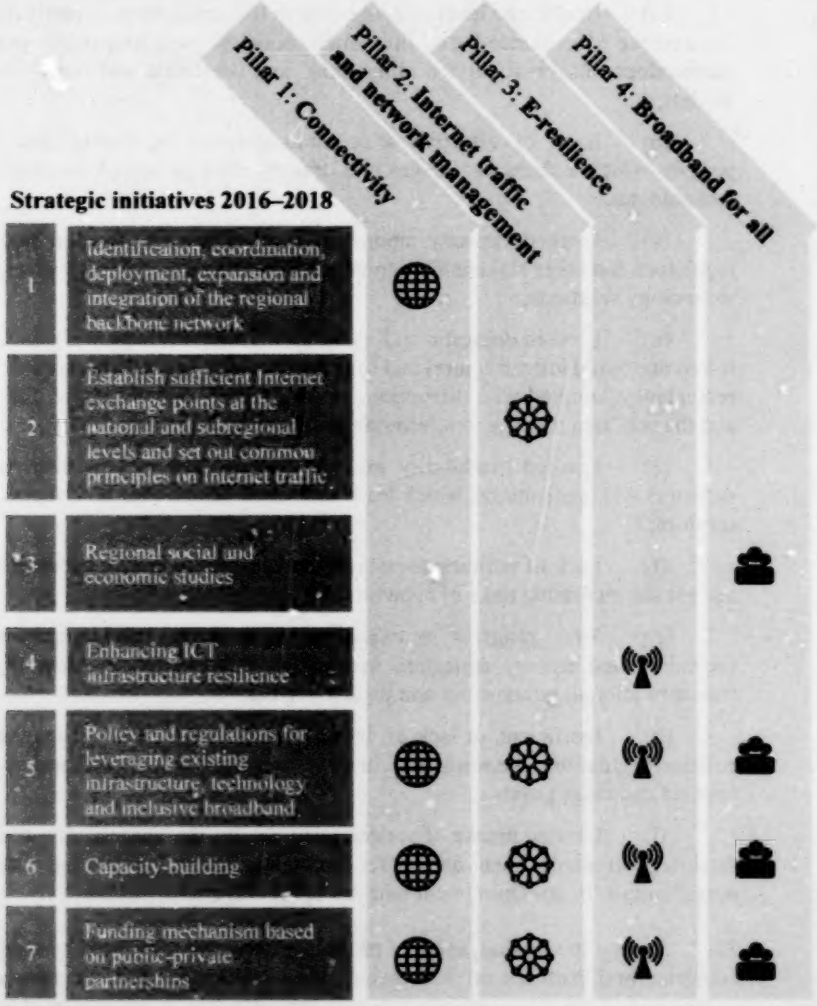
[7] See www.unescap.org/events/first-meeting-working-group-asia-pacific-information-superhighway.

[8] See www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Outcome%20Document%20Sept%202015.pdf for the draft outcome document of the first session of the Working Group on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway.

[9] See www.unescap.org/events/second-session-working-group-asia-pacific-information-superhighway.

Superhighway initiative for consideration at the seventy-third session of the Commission. In resolution 73/6, adopted by consensus, the Commission invited members and associate members to cooperate in the implementation of the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway[10] and the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Regional Cooperation Framework Document.[11] The Commission also invited members and associate members to promote broad-based partnerships, including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation for broadband connectivity. The Master Plan focuses on four areas, namely connectivity (promoting fibre-optic broadband network expansion throughout the Asia-Pacific region), Internet traffic and network management (strengthening of efficient traffic and network management for Internet reliability and redundancy), e-resilience (boosting ICT network resilience to support effective disaster management) and broadband for all (promoting affordable broadband access for all). Seven strategic initiatives were identified by member States to guide the implementation of the Master Plan (see figure).

Pillars and strategic initiatives of the Asia-Pacific information superhighway


Pillar 1: Connectivity
Pillar 2: Internet traffic and network management
Pillar 3: E-resilience
Pillar 4: Broadband for all
Strategic initiatives 2016–2018
1
Identification, coordination, deployment, expansion and integration of the regional backbone network
2
Establish sufficient Internet exchange points at the national and subregional levels and set out common principles on Internet traffic
3
Regional social and economic studies
4
Enhancing ICT infrastructure resilience
5
Policy and regulations for leveraging existing infrastructure, technology and inclusive broadband
6
Capacity-building
7
Funding mechanism based on public-private partnerships

[10] E/ESCAP/CICTSTI(1)/2.

[11] E/ESCAP/CICTSTI(1)/3.

B. Progress in implementation

17. The first session of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee was held in Dhaka on 1 and 2 November 2017. Co-hosted by ESCAP and the Department of Information and Communication Technology of Bangladesh, the session was attended by representatives of 23 member States and as well as representatives of United Nations specialized agencies and related organizations, international organizations, the private sector, civil society and think tanks.[12]

18. Member States were asked to submit country reports that identified challenges and opportunities with regard to promoting national and cross-border ICT connectivity in line with the strategic initiatives in the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway and its four pillars. Fifteen member States responded and their inputs also served as the basis for the development of the subregional implementation plans detailed below.

19. The following common key challenges were identified by member States:

(a) Inadequate level of investment in ICT infrastructure partly due to the absence of evidence-based investment policies, including public-private partnerships, universal service obligations, and wholesale and retail pricing models;

(b) Lack of effective telecommunications regulations and ICT policies which address challenges and opportunities presented by emerging technologies;

(c) Limited capacity among ICT policymakers, decision makers, regulators and other stakeholders to address the digital divide with emerging technology solutions;

(d) Limited domestic and international fibre-optic network capacity (often due to old infrastructure) and routes (especially in rural areas) as well as redundancy, coupled with disruptions to connectivity due to natural disasters and the resulting damage to telecommunications facilities and cables;

(e) Limited availability of local content and content distribution networks and applications, which leads to limited demand for ICT access and services;

(f) Lack of policies, measures and capacity to ensure cybersecurity against the increasing risks of cyberattacks;

(g) Slow progress in expanding ICT literacy and education at secondary and tertiary education institutions, exacerbated by slow digital transformation in government and private sectors;

(h) Inefficient, or lack of, Internet traffic and network management policies, regulations, measures and capacity, including lack of open and neutral Internet exchange points;

(i) Limited uptake of various technologies for connectivity, such as satellite communications and other emerging technologies, and limited opportunities for co-deployment with transport and energy sectors.

20. During the session, specific proposals were also submitted by member countries and partners on addressing those challenges and on advancing

[12] See www.unescap.org/events/first-session-asia-pacific-information-superhighway-ap-steering-committee.

implementation of the initiative. The proposals and suggested actions are summarized below:[12]

(a) To conduct a pre-feasibility study to identify specific challenges and opportunities of ICT connectivity at the subregional level, including for Central and Western Asia and neighbouring countries;

(b) To develop a United Nations Volunteers partnership programme for the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative at regional and subregional levels;

(c) To establish a network comprising academia under the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative;

(d) To explore co-deployment opportunities with the transport and energy sectors through joint research on technology, regulations and benefits;

(e) To coordinate interested organizations and countries, such as Nepal, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines on e-resilience and co-hosting e-resilience meetings;

(f) To coordinate the provision of regional flood information, of community-based flood early warning systems and of forest fire detection and monitoring for socioeconomic and ecological resilience;

(g) To co-host with the Pacific Islands Telecommunications Association the subregional meeting on the Asia-Pacific information superhighway in 2018, at which participants will discuss the operationalization of the Pacific priorities identified for the subregional implementation plan;

(h) To review the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Maps[13] (developed in collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union) and the Internet Exchange Point map[14] (developed in collaboration with the Internet Society) and inform the secretariat of any gaps, new developments or necessary adjustments;

(i) To conduct a regional study on ICT and education, as limited school connectivity was identified as a major obstacle in promoting broadband for all;

(j) To explore the possibility of collaboration with research institutes for landlocked countries to address their specific challenges and opportunities in extending and expanding broadband connectivity;

(k) To explore potential collaboration on a joint academia conference to deepen the understanding of challenges and opportunities associated with the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative;

(l) To support the Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway project through subregional implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative for North and Central Asia.

21. Furthermore, in collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union, the secretariat continued to support member States by providing updates on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Maps. They provide member States with visual information on fibre-optic cables between and within countries in the region. They can serve as an analysis tool

[13] www.unescap.org/our-work/ict-disaster-risk-reduction/asia-pacific-information-superhighway/asia-pacific-information-superhighway-maps.

[14] www.unescap.org/our-work/ict-disaster-risk-reduction/asia-pacific-information-superhighway/ixpmap.

for, inter alia, the state of infrastructure connectivity and the identification of missing links and cross-border infrastructure gaps, under pillar 1 (connectivity) of the Asia-Pacific information superhighway.

22. The Internet Exchange Point map for Asia and the Pacific, created in collaboration with the Internet Society, has been shared with member States. The heat map shows the percentage of coverage of Internet exchange points. A tally of the number of major cities in each member State is given, as well as the number of cities with coverage and without. The map was developed to support the policy dialogue under pillar 2 (Internet traffic and network management) of the Asia-Pacific information superhighway.

23. In addition, the secretariat and its partners have conducted research, held activities and carried out projects in support of the seven strategic initiatives and four pillars of Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway.[12] Technical reports[15] were developed to provide member States with information on specific issues relevant to the Master Plan and the Regional Cooperation Framework Document in order to raise awareness on challenges and opportunities and to facilitate evidence-based dialogue on issues of relevance to the region. The findings of those reports are summarized in document ESCAP/CICTSTI/2018/3.

IV. Review of the implementation of the Master Plan for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway (2016–2018)

24. The Master Plan and the Regional Cooperation Framework Document stipulate that a review should be conducted in order to revise and update both documents beyond 2018 and that the proposed changes be presented to the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation.[16] This section contains information on the review process and expected outcomes which will be presented at the second session of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee, in Bangkok on 27 and 28 August 2018, for its endorsement. For the second session of the Committee on Information and Communications Technology, Science, Technology and Innovation, the proposed master plan for the Asia-Pacific information superhighway, 2019–2022, is contained in document ESCAP/CICTSTI/2018/INF/1 and the proposed Asia-Pacific information superhighway regional cooperation framework document, 2019–2022, in document ESCAP/CICTSTI/2018/INF/2.

25. As part of the review process, the secretariat distributed standardized feedback questionnaires at the consultations to ensure that the activities helped to advance the objectives of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative. Of the participants who completed the questionnaire at the second session of the Working Group on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway in 2016, 85 per cent indicated that the meeting and discussions on reviewing the draft master plan and regional cooperation framework document had effectively promoted a collaborative approach to addressing challenges related to fixed broadband at the regional and subregional levels. In addition, 89 per cent of participants indicated that the agenda of the meeting[17] reflected

[15] See www.unescap.org/our-work/ict-disaster-risk-reduction/asia-pacific-information-superhighway/resources%20for%20the%20list%20of%20reports.

[16] E/ESCAP/CICTSTI(1)/2, para. 43, and E/ESCAP/CICTSTI(1)/3, paras. 9 and 10.

[17] See www.unescap.org/events/second-session-working-group-asia-pacific-information-superhighway.

the needs and priorities of member States in the area of broadband connectivity development.

26. At the first meeting of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee in November 2017, 88 per cent of participants indicated that the meeting effectively identified priority areas and key emerging issues in promoting broadband connectivity in the Asia-Pacific region, and 88 per cent said that subregional and regional dialogues and exchanges enhanced regional broadband connectivity across the region. They also indicated that the meeting was useful in identifying key challenges and ways forward with regard to narrowing subregional and regional broadband connectivity divides (86 per cent).

27. As a follow-up to that meeting, on 12 December 2017, the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Group met. It then held a joint session with the Working Group on the Asian Highway Network (its seventh meeting) on 13 December 2017 to discuss subregional implementation plans.[18]

28. That discussion focused on the opportunity presented by the co-deployment of ICT and transportation infrastructures for cost savings and efficiency gains. Member States recognized that co-deployment and co-habitation of fibre-optic cables along the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks, power grids, and oil and gas pipelines would be an effective and cost-efficient means of implementation, especially in rural areas that remained unserved or underserved, and it would also attract infrastructure investment opportunities within the region. Ninety-two per cent of the participants stated that key challenges and ways forward with regard to narrowing subregional and regional broadband connectivity divides had been identified.

29. Additionally, visibility and interactions with various partners were enhanced. For instance, the secretariat was invited to present the outcomes of the first session of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee to the Eighteenth Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Telecommunications and Information Technology Senior Officials Meeting, held in Siem Reap, Cambodia, from 27 to 29 November 2017. The secretariat presented the update to *A Pre-Feasibility Study on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway in the ASEAN Sub-Region: Conceptualization, International Traffic and Quality Analysis, Network Topology Design and Implementation Model*[19] and proposed a new approach, namely developing northern and southern corridors to address different connectivity requirements given the diverse development stages of ASEAN member countries. In particular, the need for enhanced e-resilience and smart city applications were taken into account in the update, which was supported by the Telecommunications and Information Technology Senior Officials Meeting.

30. Importantly, an increasing number of organizations and agencies indicated their intention to align their respective activities with and contribute to the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative as implementing partners. For instance, the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative is now identified as one of the International Telecommunication Union's strategic initiatives in Asia and the Pacific, while various think tanks and technical partners, such as the Internet Society, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, the Asia-Pacific Network Information Centre

[18] See www.unescap.org/events/asia-pacific-information-superhighway-steering-group-meeting-12-december-2017-and-joint.

[19] ESCAP and National Information Society Agency (February 2016).

and LIRNEasia, proposed initiatives for its implementation. As a result, meetings on the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative not only facilitate dialogue between policymakers and different stakeholders but also provide an opportunity for different stakeholders to propose joint initiatives and harmonize their approaches for greater synergy, coherence and impact.[20]

31. In support of systematic information sharing among member States and partner organizations, the secretariat developed online tools and platforms in collaboration with implementing partners of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative. The ICT and DRR Gateway[21] is an online platform that provides government officials and the public with updated information and news on ICT and disaster risk reduction in the region. One of the tools published on the Gateway is the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway E-resilience Toolkit,[22] which provides information on the spectrum of available ICT tools and best practices that may help policymakers in the Asia-Pacific region to enhance e-resilience and disaster risk management. These platforms and tools are designed to increase access to information, facilitate cost-efficient dialogue and share the findings of the secretariat's reports in a systematic and sustainable manner.

V. Master plan and regional cooperation framework document for the Asia-Pacific information superhighway, 2019–2022

32. Taking into account the activities and findings already mentioned in the present document, this section contains information on the proposed master plan and regional cooperation framework document for the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative for 2019–2022, building on the previous documents of the same name.

33. In the proposals, particular attention is given to governance structure and leveraging effective multi-stakeholder partnerships in the implementation of the seven strategic initiatives of the original Master Plan, in line with the guidance provided at the first session of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee.

A. Structure

34. According to its terms of reference, membership of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee is open to all member States of ESCAP, non-profit organizations and research institutes with policy and technical expertise and experts from member countries.[23] Its Bureau is elected by Steering Committee members for a term of one year and the Steering Committee meets once a year. The Steering Committee elected Bangladesh as the Chair and China and the Lao People's Democratic Republic as Vice-Chairs.

[20] See ESCAP/CICTSTI/2018/INF/1 for a list of implementing partners and activities that contributed to the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative.

[21] http://drrgateway.net/.

[22] http://drrgateway.net/information-communications-technology/Asia-Pacific-E-Resilience-Toolkit.

[23] E/ESCAP/CICTSTI(1)/2, annex I.

35. Subregional steering groups support existing regional and subregional initiatives through the development and implementation of the subregional implementation plans.[24] Implementation groups may be established at the subregional level as deemed appropriate.

36. The Steering Committee's and subregional steering groups' main deliverables for the updated master plan and regional cooperation framework document, 2019–2022, will consist of implementation plans at the subregional level (overseen by the Steering Committee), pre-feasibility studies at the subregional level (overseen by the subregional steering groups) and a feasibility study at the level of implementing entities (implementation group).

37. The goal of the pre-feasibility study for each subregion is to provide an intercountry overview of the subregion's ICT connectivity development and digital divide; to identify gaps, challenges and opportunities; and to identify synergies with existing initiatives to pave the way for the feasibility study. It is proposed that the pre-feasibility study be developed and coordinated with subregional organizations and member States, with oversight provided by the respective subregional steering groups with possible involvement of implementation group members, including financial institutions.

38. This will be followed by a feasibility study. It will focus on a specific project, as guided by the pre-feasibility study findings, in support of the development of the project, in order to facilitate implementation and partnerships that are aligned with priorities determined by the subregional steering groups. The studies should be site specific and address specific challenges and opportunities, such as physical infrastructure, including detailed design and topology, as well as costing, resource requirements (including capacity), policy and regulatory requirements, technology options, duration, financing options and implementing partners, among others.

B. Leveraging effective partnerships for the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative

39. Significant support has been provided by member States and key partners during development and implementation process. During the first session of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee, 13 organizations submitted additional activities and projects in support of the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative, namely: Asia Pacific Network Information Centre; Central Visayas Information Sharing Network Foundation; International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development; International Development Research Centre; Internet Society; Korea Telecom; LIRNEasia; Monenco Consulting Engineers; Pacific ICT Regulatory Resource Centre; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; United Nations Volunteers; University of the South Pacific; and World Bank.[12] In this context, the strategic initiatives of the 2019–2022 master plan are updated to reflect emerging issues of concern, proposed new activities and new implementing partners. The Russian Academy of Sciences is collaborating with the secretariat to explore potential joint activities under the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative in East and North-East Asia. In addition, with the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, the secretariat is exploring the possibility of joint activities in East and North-East Asia, North and Central Asia, South and South-West Asia, and South-East Asia.

[24] Ibid., annex II.

40. The secretariat also capitalized on the effective use of coordination mechanisms and platforms of United Nations organizations and regional and international organizations, such as the Regional Inter-agency Working Group on Information and Communications Technologies. Through such regional coordination mechanisms, organizations have systematically provided updates on progress in the implementation of the initiative in order to maximize synergies and avoid duplication by sharing programmes of work and activities. Such regional coordination among agencies will be strengthened in the coming years.

41. Leveraging different partnerships between member States and other multi-stakeholders also enhances the effectiveness of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway initiative. In particular, financial and in-kind contributions have enabled the secretariat and its partners to support the implementation of the Master Plan since 2016. Examples of such financial and in-kind contributions include the co-hosting by the Government of the Republic of Korea of the first session of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Working Group in Incheon in 2015, the co-hosting by the Government of China of the second session of the Working Group in Guangzhou in 2016 and the co-hosting by the Government of Bangladesh of the first session of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee in Dhaka in 2017. Within the secretariat, the Information and Communications Technology and Disaster Risk Reduction Division and the Transport Division are currently collaborating on a technical study on the opportunities and challenges of infrastructure co-deployment in the region. The findings will provide member States with information on the way forward with regard to promoting co-deployment of ICT and transport infrastructure in the region.

VI. Issues for consideration by the Committee

42. In view of the progress, opportunities and challenges outlined above, the Committee may wish to provide guidance to the secretariat as follows:

(a) The Committee may wish to consider endorsing the outcomes of the first session of the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee, as summarized in the present note;

(b) The Committee is invited to endorse the updates to the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Master Plan, for 2019–2022, and the Asia-Pacific Information Superhighway Regional Cooperation Framework Document, for 2019–2022, as summarized in the present document, while taking note of the details contained in information documents ESCAP/CICTSTI/2018/INF/1 and ESCAP/CICTSTI/2018/INF/2;

(c) The Committee may wish to actively encourage the engagement and participation of various stakeholders, such as the private sector, academia and think tanks, in the implementation of the updated master plan and regional cooperation framework document, 2019–2022, in particular the development of pre-feasibility and feasibility studies;

(d) The Committee may wish to encourage member States and partner organizations to continue supporting the implementation of the master plan and regional cooperation framework document for 2019–2022 through financial and in-kind contributions.